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## Economic Organization and Cultural Cohesion in the Coastal Hinterland of 19th-Century Kenya: An Archaeology of Fugitive Slave Communities

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## September 2007 Newsletter

### **Economic Organization and Cultural Cohesion in the Coastal Hinterland of 19th-Century Kenya: An Archaeology of Fugitive Slave Communities**

By Lydia Wilson<sup>1</sup>

#### **Abstract**

The following is a dissertation proposal for doctoral research scheduled to begin in September 2007. The project centers on the archaeological investigation of settlements founded in 19th-century Kenya by people escaping slavery. It considers the economic insularity and cultural heterogeneity of runaway slave groups relative to the coastal hinterland communities that neighbored them. In Swahili, fugitive slaves were known as *watoro*. This project investigates the creation of *watoro* communities through a dual focus on inter- and intra-group relationships. Firstly, it explores the relative economic integration of these nascent communities into regional networks. Secondly, the project investigates whether fugitive slaves developed homogenized sociocultural norms or, alternately, maintained long-term cultural heterogeneity. The above inquiries will be evaluated through an archaeological comparison of *watoro* settlements with villages of neighboring Mijikenda peoples in the coastal hinterland. Relying on Mijikenda settlements as alternate examples of 19th-century rural Eastern African life, the project will explore how the status of *watoro* as refugees from enslavement shaped the economic, social, and cultural organization of their villages. Indices targeted in this investigation include diet, trade, craft production, house style, and spatial organization of domestic activities.

#### **Project Focus and Central Problem**

This project centers on the archaeological investigation of settlements founded in 19th-century Kenya by people escaping slavery. It considers the economic insularity and cultural heterogeneity of fugitive slave groups relative to the coastal hinterland communities that neighbored them. Runaways typically fled alone, brought few to no material possessions with them, and bore diverse cultural and social backgrounds. This project investigates the creation of new communities by such fugitives through a dual focus on inter- and intra-group relationships.

Firstly, it explores the relative economic integration of these nascent communities into regional networks. Secondly, the project investigates whether fugitive slave groups developed homogenized sociocultural norms or, alternately, maintained long-term cultural heterogeneity.

Some anthropologists have noted that fugitive slave communities experienced group formation processes at an accelerated rate (Bilby 1996). Improvised under stress by people of dissimilar cultural background and social experience, fugitive slave groups in Eastern Africa provide researchers with valuable case studies from which to extrapolate more broadly about community creation and maintenance. This project's focus on nascent refugee groups supports a renewed interest in the archaeology of communities (e.g., Canuto and Yaeger 2000), as well as aligning more broadly with increasing archaeological emphasis on identity (Meskell 2001; Orser 2001). Community creation remains the dominant research theme in fugitive slave archaeology, particularly in the Americas where the field is best developed (Weik 2002, 1997; Orser and Funari 2001; Allen 1999; Orser 1996, 1994). This project offers a divergent sociocultural context and more fluid power dynamic in which to consider fugitive slave community formation: my research thus will facilitate cross-cultural interpretations of slavery and its legacies. Further, the project will strengthen and broaden the still-emergent field of the archaeology of slavery in Eastern Africa (Croucher 2006, 2004; Kusimba 2006, 2004; Kiriama 2005).

In the mid-19th century, intensification of cash-crop agriculture on the Eastern African coast by Omani colonists and Swahili indigenes provoked an upsurge in the local slave trade. As the coastal plantation economy solidified, increasing numbers of enslaved people fled to the hinterland, and, by the 1840s, escaped slaves began to found independent settlements. In Swahili, such fugitives were known as *watoro*. Most *watoro* settlements abutted groups known as the Mijikenda, nine closely related Bantu-speaking peoples in coastal Kenya's immediate

hinterland. I plan to rely on Mijikenda settlements as alternate models of 19th-century rural Eastern African life. My project will center on the archaeological comparison of two watoro villages and two neighboring contemporaneous Mijikenda sites. Firstly, I intend to investigate the economic insularity of watoro settlements relative to their Mijikenda neighbors. I seek to explore how the position of fugitives as refugees from enslavement shaped the economic strategies and organization of their villages. More archaeologically visible economic interactions may also illuminate inter-group social and cultural ties. Secondly, the project will compare watoro and Mijikenda intra-site diversity. Through the identification and excavation of several houses within each settlement type, I will investigate whether cultural behavior appears more varied at fugitive slave settlements. An analysis of heterogeneity in such nascent communities offers broad insight into processes of community formation and cohesion: in the absence of shared traditions and practices, what holds newly formed groups together? As discussed in further detail in a following section of this proposal, I will rely on practice theory and household archaeological methodology in pursuit of the above inquiries.

This project aligns with two developing archaeological fields, the archaeology of fugitive slaves and the archaeology of slavery in Africa (e.g., Bredwa-Mensah 2004; DeCorse 2001). The proposed study provides an opportunity to relate these disciplines and their research foci. Upon absconding, watoro typically negotiated a more fluid social environment than did many fugitive slaves in the New World. Competition for control of Eastern Africa between the ruling Omani Sultanate and aspiring English and German colonists supported such fluidity by providing runaways with opportunities for strategic alliances with imperial rivals. Further, prior to the 20th century, colonial control of the coastal hinterland (where watoro settled) was at best tenuous. My analysis of fugitive slave community creation in a very different power dynamic than those

previously studied in the Americas will help to clarify how power relationships shape and impinge on group formation. The relative fluidity and rigidity of power relationships is an established research theme in the archaeology of slavery in Africa (e.g., Croucher 2006; Lucas 2004). Nonetheless, fugitive slaves have attracted little archaeological attention on the continent. As in the Americas, fugitive slave groups in Africa may allow researchers to better view groups victimized by slavery and the slave trade as active negotiators of their social domination. My project provides a nexus through which the archaeology of fugitive slaves and the archaeology of slavery in Africa may speak to and inform one another. By advocating the value of a comparison between fugitive slaves in the New World and Eastern Africa, however, I do not seek to diminish the dissimilar challenges and sociocultural landscapes that these groups faced (Franklin and Schweninger 1999; Glassman 1991; Cooper 1977, 1981; Miers and Kopytoff 1977; Price 1973).

Beyond its anthropological and cross-regional significance, the proposed project also has local and practical importance in Eastern Africa. The National Museums of Kenya (NMK) is a participant in the UNESCO Slave Routes Program, and one of its aims is the development of a museum on slavery. The proposed project, which will be affiliated with the NMK and incorporate NMK employees in all research phases, promises to advance such goals. The archaeology of slavery in the region continues to develop and, with it, the first sustained archaeological interest in 19th-century Eastern Africa. Building on recently developed artifact typologies (Croucher 2006, 2004), my project will contribute to better practical understandings of 19<sup>th</sup>-century material culture in Eastern Africa. Moreover, Mijikenda groups, particularly in recent centuries, have been largely archaeologically ignored (but see Helm 2004, 2000). I recognize Mijikenda communities not merely as alternate models of rural Eastern African life by which to clarify watoro lifeways, but also as the products of their own social, economic, and

cultural histories, which my project results may reflect and illuminate. Finally, few watoro descendents today self-identify by their fugitive slave heritage; they have instead adopted the ancestries and ethnic affiliations of their hinterland neighbors (Herlehy and Morton 1988). My comparison of 19th-century Mijikenda and watoro villages may also secondarily contribute to the interpretation of such groups' progressive integration.

## **Historical Background**

For at least 2,000 years, the Eastern African coast has acted as an important center of trade in the Indian Ocean commercial network (Sheriff 1987). Enslaved peoples long factored into the range of commodities exchanged, as documents as early as the 2nd century A.D. attest (Beachey 1976). Despite this time-deep history of regional involvement in the slave trade, Eastern African runaway slave communities first surface in the written record only in the 1840s and their founding was likely impelled by the development of a coastal plantation economy dependent on enslaved labor. This section provides a brief account of the historical context in which this plantation economy emerged. I also explore the fluid power dynamic that resulted both from imperial competition between Omani colonists and European rivals and from sustained conflict between hinterland groups.

Oman initially secured political control of coastal Eastern Africa in 1698. Then, Omani forces joined with local Swahili allies to defeat the Portuguese and seize control of Fort Jesus, a major Portuguese fortification overlooking Mombasa's harbor. Over the next century and a half, Eastern Africa's slave and ivory trades became increasingly economically important to the Omani empire. In 1833, Sultan Seyyid Said relocated his residence and his court from Muscat to Zanzibar Island (Beachey 1976). British government envoys first established sustained contact

with Eastern Africa in the early 19th century; the involvement of British abolitionists in the area began almost as early. The Eastern African slave trade made a convenient target for Britain. Unlike the Atlantic trade, the British themselves were not implicated in the Eastern African slave trade; the pursuit of abolition also offered a useful excuse for colonialism (Nwulia 1975). Through political coercion of the Omani Sultanate, the British achieved increasing legal restrictions on the overseas slave trade. These impingements ironically encouraged greater local use of slave labor. Facing staggering losses as external slave markets withered, Omani and Swahili entrepreneurs quickly developed coastal clove, grain, and coconut plantations dependent on enslaved labor. Under British-backed decrees against the slave trade, the trade of items produced by enslaved workers importantly remained legitimate. The *collapse* of the overseas slave trade thus prompted the intensification of large-scale, cash crop agriculture on the coast and a subsequent *upsurge* in the local slave trade in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. As the coastal plantation economy solidified, working conditions for enslaved people on the coast worsened, motivating an increasing number of captives to flee (Sheriff 1987:60; Glassman 1995:81). Britain's enforcement of antislavery treaties on the coast also lessened planters' power to control enslaved workers and made escape an increasingly feasible option as the 19th century progressed (Morton 1990:15).

Upon escape, watoro typically fled inland: refugees stood a better chance of evading recapture in the coastal hinterland than on the coast itself. Britain and Germany officially restricted Omani control of the Eastern African mainland to a 10-mile-wide coastal strip in 1886 (Bennett 1986:140). Even prior to this decree, the Sultan's authority -- and thus slave owners' ability to recover enslaved workers -- progressively decreased the farther one traveled inland. However, the coastal hinterland presented its own dangers to watoro refugees. Like the Eastern

African coast, the coastal hinterland suffered significant social and political upheaval in the 19th century. Most dramatic was Oromo pastoralists' loss of control over the northern hinterland. By the mid-19th century, the Oromo had dominated the hinterland west of Takaungu and Malindi for at least four centuries. Excepting the hunter-gatherer Wata and Lingala groups, the Oromo refused to allow strangers to settle among them. They pressed the Swahili east to the coast and confined encroaching Giriama migrants to hills west of their territory. The Oromo dominated these agricultural groups through their fierce reputation and readiness to engage in violence. Oromo dominance of the northern coastal hinterland collapsed in the 1860s under mounting pressure by competing pastoralist groups. In their annual northerly migrations, Maa-speaking (Maasai) herders invaded Oromo territory, attacked their settlements, and stole their cattle. To avoid such raids, Oromo groups increasingly shifted northward. Once north of the Sabaki River, Oromo refugees faced additional pressure from Somali pastoralists, who were in the process of a southerly territorial expansion (Brantely 1981:15). Sustained conflict between pastoralist groups opened wide swaths of territory previously controlled by the Oromo and provided watoro migrants space to settle west of Mombasa, Takaungu, and Malindi. Here, runaway slaves established two of their largest villages, Fuladoyo and Makongeni. The greatest number of migrant agriculturalists in this newly open area, however, were Giriama.

The Giriama are one of nine peoples who together constitute the Mijikenda (literally 'nine villages'). Others include the Chonyi, Digo, Duruma, Jibana, Kambe, Kauma, Rabai, and Ribe. Some historians have argued that Mijikenda ethnic consciousness emerged only in the early 20th century as a strategy to link hinterland peoples with common economic and social interests into a larger bloc and strengthen their negotiating power with British colonialists (Willis 1993). Nonetheless, member groups display striking cultural similarity. Despite maintaining



distinct ethnonyms, all 19th-century Mijikenda peoples were agriculturalists, spoke closely related languages, emphasized age-sets and patrilineal clans in their social structure, and shared a single migratory origin story (Spear 1978; Prins 1952). As discussed briefly in the introduction to this proposal, I intend to excavate two watoro settlements and two nearby Mijikenda villages. Due to the location of identified watoro sites (see ‘Previous Archaeological Work in 19th-Century Eastern Africa’ and Figure 1), excavated Mijikenda sites will be in areas occupied by Giriama and Digo groups. In 19th-century documents, such areas were typically referred to as being inhabited by ‘Nyika’ people (literally ‘bush’ in Swahili), a widely applied derogatory term that hinterland peoples sought to displace with the later adoption of a ‘Mijikenda’ ethnonym (Spears 1978; Brantley 1981). This project assumes neither that Giriama and Digo groups were culturally homogeneous nor that ethnicity was necessarily the most relevant identity in the coastal hinterland of the 19th-century (e.g., Herlehy 1984). I nonetheless recognize the utility of Mijikenda villages to provide alternate examples of rural Eastern African life. Such alternate models help to clarify how watoro lifeways may have been shaped by refugees’ prior enslavement. This project considers the creation of new communities by such refugees through a dual focus on intra- and inter-group relationships; investigations will particularly focus on intra-settlement cultural heterogeneity and relative economic integration into broader regional networks.

### **Research Orientation**

This project couples a household archaeological methodology with practice theory. Household archaeological approaches (e.g., Barile and Brandon 2004; Alison 1999; Kent 1990) represent a culmination of decades of movement toward smaller units of analysis in

archaeological research. Rather than define a culture area, region, or site by certain material attributes and behavioral patterns, researchers have increasingly sought to understand heterogeneity within such archaeologically defined units. Consideration of heterogeneity appears especially appropriate in the analysis of nascent communities, such as fugitive slave groups, whose members would have only over time -- if at all -- developed and assimilated toward homogenized group norms. Household archaeology also importantly supports the integration of data at several scales of analysis. Practitioners seek not to interpret house remains in isolation but instead to consider how households participated in broader social and economic networks.

Some archaeologists have recently incorporated practice theory into household-oriented research (e.g., Lightfoot 1998; Stewart-Abernathy 2004). Allowing for improvisation yet shaping and limiting the practice of that improvisation, *habitus* is “embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history” (Bourdieu 1990:56). As the unconscious embodiment of past experience, *habitus* allows people to routinize their daily activities and operate from within a system of cultural rules and classifications without abiding by them consciously or purposefully. Researchers cannot directly observe the structures underlying *habitus* but rather must deduce them from the daily patterns of life that they create.

Archaeologists have been broadly attracted to practice theory and specifically *habitus* because of its emphasis on everyday life and the incorporation of material culture into its theoretical approach (e.g., Bourdieu 1977:91). Within a household framework, practice theory has been perceived as especially productive, as researchers view the household as a potential site of social production and reproduction.

This project is particularly well served by a practice theoretical approach. The inter- and intra-group relationships of watoro settlements were expressed through everyday behavior. Practice theory helps archaeologists to view material culture contextually and deduce the behaviors in which artifacts were used. Further, practice theoreticians have long been concerned with power relationships (Ortner 1984:149). As watoro negotiated a constant vulnerability to re-enslavement, power dynamics must be incorporated into the analysis of their community formation. Practice theory also importantly links everyday behavior to deeply held cultural orientations and rules. This cognitive approach is useful in the analysis of cultural heterogeneity. The project will not only explore whether cultural behavior at watoro settlements is more heterogeneous than at neighboring Mijikenda sites, but also consider what diverse cultural orientations are implied by such diverse practice. A household archaeological methodology is similarly critical to this project's inquiries into cultural heterogeneity, as it facilitates the analysis of intra-site diversity. This project's household approach will also support the investigation of regional economic relationships through a nested analysis incorporating household, settlement, and regional scales.

### **Research Questions and Previous Relevant Research**

My proposed focus on watoro groups supports increasing attention to more recent centuries in Eastern African archaeology. The project particularly builds on a growing emphasis on slavery in the region (Croucher 2006, 2004; Kusimba 2006, 2004; Kiriama 2005). My research also articulates with the broadening field of maroon (fugitive slave) archaeology. Maroon archaeology originally developed in the 1980s in reaction to a perceived overemphasis on plantation-based master-slave relationships in African-American archaeology (Weik 1997).

Slave resistance was the primary focus of many early studies. More recently, community formation has emerged as a dominant research theme. Archaeologists have interpreted group formation through analysis of the sociocultural cohesion of fugitive slave groups as well as maroons' interactions with outsiders. This two-pronged analytical approach resonates with my project's emphasis on intra- and inter-group relationships. The following section contextualizes my investigation of watoro cultural heterogeneity and economic strategies in terms of previous relevant research.

### **Inter-Group Relations: Relative Economic Integration into Regional Networks**

I intend to explore how the status of watoro as refugees from enslavement shaped the economic strategies and success of their settlements. The relative economic integration of watoro into regional networks will offer insight into how such fugitives constituted themselves as groups in their interactions with outsiders. These more archaeologically visible economic relationships may also clarify inter-group social and cultural ties. Questions to be pursued include: did runaways' vulnerability to re-enslavement and position as newcomers to the hinterland constrain their movements around the countryside and affect their capacity to engage in regional trade? Did an emphasis on group defense lessen their ability to devote energy to food procurement or craft production? How did watoro figure into the larger political economy of the hinterland? These inquiries will be pursued primarily through the analysis of diet, craft production, and participation in trade.

This project draws on the theoretical orientations and conclusions of previous economic analyses of maroons. Americanists have most often considered economic organization as part of broader inquiries into the insularity of fugitive slave settlements. Researchers have asked: were runaways engaged in broader regional economic, social, and cultural networks? Or, as their

settlements were typically situated in inaccessible locations and as they often faced violent threats, if not attacks, from outsiders, is it more appropriate to view maroons as isolated and self-sufficient (Orser 1996:41)? Does such communities' geographic isolation necessarily point to a concurrent economic or cultural isolation? In her study of Fort Mose, a settlement established by fugitive slaves in Spanish Florida, Reitz (1994) argues that food remains reflect the village's economic self-sufficiency. The dearth of artifacts Sayers et al. (2007) recovered in excavations of maroon settlements in the Great Dismal Swamp of North Carolina and Virginia similarly suggests little interaction with outsiders. Other archaeologists such as Orser (1994, 1996) in his interpretation of Brazil's Palmares, and Weik (2002) in his interpretation of Florida's Pilaklikaha, have portrayed maroon settlements as players in ultimately global economies, maintaining compelling connections to outside groups. These interpretive divergences stem at least partially from substantive differences in the socio-cultural organization and histories of studied sites. As the largest and longest-standing maroon society known in the Americas, Palmares cannot be readily equated with small encampments in the Great Dismal Swamp. Different maroon settlements clearly maintained different levels of economic interaction with outsiders, pursued diverse economic strategies, and achieved varying levels of economic wellbeing. This diversity provides a context in which to identify potential broader implications of watoro economic organization. For example, what might watoro settlements' insularity from or broader integration into regional economies signal about the political and cultural relationships runaways maintained with Omani and Swahili slaveowners?

Analysis of watoro settlements' economic organization also promises insight into the power dynamics of Eastern African slavery. As a measure of defense, fugitive slaves in the Americas often located their villages in isolated areas with a poor resource base. From their

founding, such communities engaged defensive strategies that curtailed their economic potential. While possessing some defensible attributes such as hilltop location or dense brush surrounds, watoro settlements appear less isolated than their counterparts in the Americas. Watoro villages' lesser physical isolation may point to Eastern African slave owners' relatively weaker ability to recover runaways. However, historical records attest to the destruction of some villages through raids led by coastal forces (Morton 1990). It is thus not yet clear to what extent continuing military threats impeded fugitives' struggles to create new prosperous lives.

While studies of maroon groups in other world regions help to direct this project's theoretical approach, my methodology derives foremost from prior archaeological research in Eastern Africa. Political economy and, particularly, trade relations are well established as research themes in the region. Recent studies have avoided strictly equating ceramic styles with cultural groups and instead used pottery to explore relationships *between* groups and regions. For example, Haaland and Msuya's research at the 8th/9th-century Tanzanian hinterland site Dakawa yielded ceramics made of local clay with coastal Tana or Triangular Incised Ware (TIW) designs (Haaland 1994/1995; Haaland and Msuya 2000). The local production of presumably imported decorative motifs demonstrates hinterland inhabitants' active domestication of coastal artistic influences.

Croucher's (2006) study of plantation communities on Zanzibar is similarly practice-focused in its analysis. Croucher demonstrates that changing consumption patterns of imported ceramics in the late 19th century reflect greater local participation of elites in a global consumer culture. However, Croucher's analysis moves beyond demonstrating interregional economic linkages to considering how these relationships and the goods they brought were mediated locally. In Zanzibar, many imported pots were large serving dishes, which, oral historical evidence

suggests, were used to engage in communal feasts and to practice *ujirani* or neighborliness, rather than -- as in the United States -- used to signal differences in socioeconomic status (Croucher 2006:326). I engage a similarly behavior-oriented approach to my research. This project seeks not only to investigate watoro economic organization and trade connections but also, through an analysis of foodways, craft production, and imported material, to understand how those connections were experienced and mediated at the local level.

### **Intra-Group Relations: Cultural Heterogeneity and Group Formation**

The second set of research questions centers on group formation processes. Since the 1990s, archaeologists have become increasingly interested in community creation and cohesion. Maroon archaeology has been active in addressing such themes (Allen 1999; Deagan and MacMahon 1995; Weik 1997). In his analysis of Palmares, Orser (1994, 1996) has advocated a cultural mosaic interpretation. Rather than engage ethnogenic models, which assume group assimilation toward homogenized norms, Orser argues that the persistent diversity of material culture at Palmares reflects a lasting cultural heterogeneity (but see Allen 1999). Weik (2002) reached very different interpretive conclusions in his analysis of the Black Seminole maroon site Pilaklikaha in Florida. He argued that Pilaklikaha residents maintained a unique settlement pattern and used distinct ceramic types, indicating that they forged a new and internally coherent culture and participated in the ethnogenesis of Black Seminoles.

The relatively fluid power dynamic of 19th-century Eastern Africa makes the region a valuable setting in which to consider such interpretive divergences. Some ethnoarchaeological work has suggested that cultural conformity is more likely to occur in groups under greater socioeconomic pressure (e.g., Hodder 1982; but see Dietler and Herbich 1998). Watoro appear to have negotiated a more flexible social environment than most New World maroons. The

proposed project provides an opportunity to investigate whether watoro expressed greater long-term cultural heterogeneity than their counterparts in the Americas and to explore what the sociopolitical implications of such a distinction would be. Coupled with recent preliminary work on maroons on the Indian Ocean island Mauritius (Chowdury 2003), my research will expand the geographic and cultural contexts in which fugitive slaves have been studied and increase archaeologists' understandings of the range of strategies and cultural patterns exhibited in community creation. Previous archaeological studies of fugitive slaves groups demonstrate the utility of such nascent communities in building broader anthropological understandings of group formation and maintenance.

Beyond analyzing the relative heterogeneity of watoro lifeways, the project will also consider cultural affiliations suggested by watoro behavior. Watoro identity remains a topic of contentious debate among historians. Leading views of slavery in Eastern Africa assert that the enslaved, even in their resistance, operated from within the worldview of their coastal (particularly Swahili) owners (Glassman 1991; Cooper 1981, 1977). Extending this interpretation, historian Glassman characterizes watoro villages as "outposts of coastal Muslim culture" (1995:106). However, ethnohistorical evidence suggests that many watoro eventually integrated into Mijikenda groups (e.g., Herlehy and Morton 1988). As identity is fluid and practice adaptable, the rapid conversion of watoro immigrants to Mijikenda norms appears a reasonable hypothesis. Watoro origins also remain to be considered (Morton 1990). In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, increasing numbers of captives were imported to the Swahili coast as demand for enslaved labor at plantations intensified; many watoro may have been born inland. Contemporaneous fugitive slave villages in Somalia's Juba Valley were initially organized by ethnic origin (Cassanelli 1987). My identification of a watoro site at Makongeni known locally



as 'Nyasa' suggests the continued significance of runaways' ethnic origins there: the Lake Nyasa (Lake Malawi) region supplied many captives to the Swahili coast.

Archaeological identification of the above cultural affiliations will be challenging. As the project encompasses excavation of 19th-century Mijikenda sites, identification of Mijikenda influences may be the most straightforward. I also plan to engage a growing archaeology of the 19th-century Swahili coast (Croucher 2004, 2006) in concert with available ethnohistorical evidence about coastal communities. In the analysis of watoro origins, I will rely heavily on ethnohistory (e.g., Zimba 2005; Livingstone and Livingstone 2001 [1865]; Alpers 1969). Though cultural affiliations are not the primary focus of this project, they are a research interest I plan to pursue further in future.

Recent archaeological considerations of settlement heterogeneity in Eastern Africa provide my project with a methodological roadmap. Croucher's (2006) study of 19th-century Zanzibari plantations encompassed diverse residents, including plantation owners, enslaved fieldworkers, and concubines. Her analysis centered on the interaction of these diverse resident groups and emphasized spatial organization of activities. A current study of Chwaka, a 10th- to 16th-century Swahili settlement by Fleisher and LaViolette (2006) echoes this emphasis on spatial analysis. Fleisher and LaViolette focused excavation on individual houses to consider economic specialization versus household-level production of pottery, cloth, beads, iron, and other craft items. My inquiry into watoro cultural heterogeneity will be similarly spatially focused. I intend not only to compare the assemblage diversity of watoro and Mijikenda sites but also to consider heterogeneity on the household level in a practice-focused intrasite analysis.

## **Previous Archaeological Work in 19th-Century Eastern Africa**

In June 2006, I completed a preliminary survey of watoro settlements in which I located four sites through walkover reconnaissance.<sup>2</sup> These were Mwazangombe, Koromio, Fuladoyo, and Makongeni. My interpretation of these sites as specific watoro settlements relies first on written historical descriptions of them and their locations. On-ground identification of the settlements was further supported by local oral histories as well as imported material, including European sponge-printed ceramics, dating the sites to the relevant era. While the 19th century remains understudied compared to earlier periods in Eastern Africa, increasing archaeological interest in slavery has recently stimulated new research emphasis on the century. Croucher's (2006, 2004) study of Zanzibari plantation communities joins Kiriama's (2005) work on newly enslaved captives and Kusimba's (2004, 2006) analysis of raided inland groups in supporting the development of an archaeology of Eastern African slavery. These studies provide descriptions and typologies of 19th-century material culture that will assist in the initial stages of my artifact analysis.

Fugitive slaves settlements constitute the centerpiece of my dissertation research, with neighboring Mijikenda sites foremost engaged as alternate models of rural Eastern African life. However, I plan to contextualize my analysis of Mijikenda sites by considering prior related archaeological work. Helm (2004, 2000) has explored dissonances (and resonances) between Mijikenda oral histories of migration and archaeological evidence of cultural continuity in the coastal hinterland for the past 2,000 years. While the 19th century remained generally tangential to Helm's research focus, my project will engage his analysis of long-term hinterland cultural and economic patterns in order to gauge the change and upheaval that, judging from historical documents, appears to have characterized the 1800s. Importantly, Helm's research will allow me

to view Mijikenda sites not merely as static null cases by which to clarify watoro lifeways but instead as similarly dynamic communities.

### **Hypotheses and Test Implications**

This project hypothesizes that fugitive slave settlements were less economically successful and more culturally heterogeneous than nearby Mijikenda villages. These hypotheses are heuristic devices to harness much broader inquiries into how the position of watoro as refugees from enslavement shaped the economic, social, and cultural organization of their settlements.

#### **1. Watoro villages were less economically successful than neighboring Mijikenda settlements.**

This hypothesis assumes that watoro remained more easily enslaveable than their Mijikenda neighbors. Consequently, a greater emphasis on defense and weaker social ties to other hinterland groups curtailed the economic success of watoro villages relative to neighboring communities. This hypothesis will be evaluated primarily through three indices: diet, craft production, and participation in trade. Evidence of a poorer diet at watoro sites (i.e., less meat) would suggest reduced economic wellbeing. The project will also explore whether Mijikenda and watoro subsistence strategies approximated one another and consider what effect the presumably greater social vulnerability of watoro communities had on their food procurement tactics. I will also study patterns of craft production (e.g., iron working, pottery making, spinning, and weaving). Intensity of craft production may reflect each group's level of participation in regional trade. If watoro faced limited trade opportunities because of reduced mobility or weaker inter-group social ties, they may have had less motivation to produce craft

items in excess of their own consumption. The relative frequency of non-local goods, particularly imported ceramics, will offer further insight into participation in trade.

Alternatively, if watoro villages were not less economically successful than neighboring Mijikenda settlements, diet quality and subsistence strategies at the two site types should appear comparable. Watoro would also likely be equally integrated into broader regional economies; we would expect levels of craft production and trade participation at watoro and Mijikenda settlements to be similar.

## **2. Watoro villages maintained greater cultural heterogeneity than neighboring Mijikenda settlements.**

This hypothesis assumes that the potentially diverse sociocultural backgrounds of watoro will be reflected through diverse behavior. The hypothesis will be evaluated primarily through the analysis of diet, local pottery, house style, and domestic spatial organization. If food remains are recovered in association with individual households, I will examine whether diet appears homogeneous across settlements. In consideration of local pottery, I will explore not only whether the prevalence of particular decorative styles or vessel shapes is greater at specific households over others but also consider what different patterns of activity such differentiation may reflect. House style -- grass-thatched or wattle-and-daub, round or square -- may also relate to identity performance. Beyond considerations of heterogeneity, I intend to investigate whether watoro house construction techniques resembled Mijikenda methods, engaged Swahili norms, or suggest lasting cultural affinities with the inland homelands from which such refugees were captured. Finally, domestic spatial organization -- that is, the organization of activities within and around houses -- will help to identify varying behavior patterns between households.

Alternatively, if watoro villages did not maintain greater cultural heterogeneity than neighboring Mijikenda groups, intrasite diversity in terms of diet, local pottery, house style, and

domestic spatial organization at both settlement types should be comparable. We would expect no greater inter-household diversity at watoro settlements than at neighboring Mijikenda sites.

## **Research Design**

I will collect data to evaluate the above hypotheses in a three-phase process. My prior identification of watoro sites through reconnaissance survey in June 2006 guarantees the basic feasibility of my research focus. Upon returning to Kenya, I first will pursue additional reconnaissance survey to locate nearby contemporaneous Mijikenda sites. I will then use systematic survey techniques to delineate and map Mijikenda and watoro site boundaries and gauge site integrity and preservation. The second phase of my research consists of the excavation of two watoro and two neighboring Mijikenda sites. Initially, test excavations will be oriented toward the identification of domestic structures through detection of postholes and packed floors; I will then pursue horizontal excavations to capture entire houses and associated middens. If identified, community middens will also be sampled. In the third and final research phase, I will analyze recovered material culture to evaluate settlement economic organization and cultural heterogeneity. A practice theory framework will inform all phases of the project. The goal of my research is the interpretation of cultural practice and behavior rather than the simple identification of material markers of watoro and/or Mijikenda sites.

### **Phase I: Site Identification and Delineation of Site Boundaries**

My June 2006 identification of four watoro sites relied on reconnaissance rather than systematic survey techniques (Fleisher and LaViolette 1999:89). That is, rather than define a sampling universe in the coastal hinterland, systematically test for archaeological sites in the area, and identify watoro sites by their material attributes, I instead relied on written

documentation of specific fugitive slave settlements, traveled to the approximate location of these sites, and then investigated available oral historical evidence and surface artifact scatters. Since archaeologists have not before researched watoro settlements, their material markers remain unclear; in a systematic survey, it would have not have been possible to differentiate watoro sites from other 19th-century settlements. Due to similar identification issues, I plan to use reconnaissance methods to locate nearby contemporaneous Mijikenda sites. Identification of Swahili sites through unsystematic reconnaissance techniques has been recently critiqued for skewing understandings of Eastern Africa history toward the minority of settlements with extant aboveground stone ruins. Reconnaissance methods also provide scant data by which to consider economic and social relations between a regional network of settlements mostly defined by wattle-and-daub rather than stone architecture (Fleisher 2003; Fleisher and LaViolette 1999). However, my research goals are well served by reconnaissance methods. Rather than attempting to build an understanding of 19th-century settlement networks, my project seeks Mijikenda sites as comparative case studies. My survey goal is to identify contemporaneous Mijikenda sites near enough to known watoro sites that they likely negotiated similar ecological conditions. However, I have no need to identify *all* nearby 19th-century Mijikenda settlements.

As the time period studied is recent and Mijikenda groups have continued to occupy the area, I plan to rely on oral history to direct site identification. The use of oral history to identify 19th-century Mijikenda sites will assure that I am not unwittingly comparing neighboring watoro settlements. Some sites Europeans considered single watoro villages were in fact settlement clusters. For example, I learned from Mijikenda elders that four neighboring sites (Bomani, Chanzuu, Nyasa, and Bikingao) made up what Europeans typically referred to as the watoro settlement Makongeni. To crosscheck oral historical evidence, I will also consider long-term

patterns of hinterland life (Helm 2000, 2004) as well as available ethnohistorical descriptions of 19th-century Mijikenda settlements (e.g., Fitzgerald 1898; Prins 1952). Anticipated site features include house gardens, thatched houses, and possibly defensive palisades.

Prior to reconnaissance identification of Mijikenda sites, I will delineate the boundaries of known watoro sites through systematic subsurface testing. In her survey of plantation sites on Zanzibar, Croucher noted that the remains of 19th-century wattle-and-daub structures often yield characteristic aboveground mounds (e.g., Croucher 2006:242), unlike similar structures from earlier periods. Ethnohistorical descriptions suggest, however, that Mijikenda groups did not typically use wattle and daub but rather grass-thatched their houses on wooden frames (Bergman 1996:202; Prins 1952:60). Archaeological recognition of thatched structures relies on packed floors, postholes, and other domestic features identifiable only through subsurface testing and not by aboveground signatures. Despite some historians' contention that watoro built square, Swahili-style houses (e.g. Glassman 1995:106), an 1882 photograph of watoro leaders at Fuladoyo depicts them before a round, thatched structure (Price 1882:91). Assuming that either watoro or Mijikenda settlements will be recognizable through aboveground remains thus appears ill advised. Rather than assume a priori that structures at either settlement type were wattle-and-daub or grass-thatched, this project will rely on historical analyses of 19th-century Eastern African housing types (e.g., McKim 1985) to recognize archaeological signatures of different building methods.

In my preliminary reconnaissance of watoro settlements in June 2006, I recorded each site's GPS coordinates (Figure 1). I plan to return to these identified areas and delineate site boundaries through subsurface testing. Using identified artifact scatters as starting points, the survey team will place shovel test pits in a 10-meter grid, whose integrity will be maintained

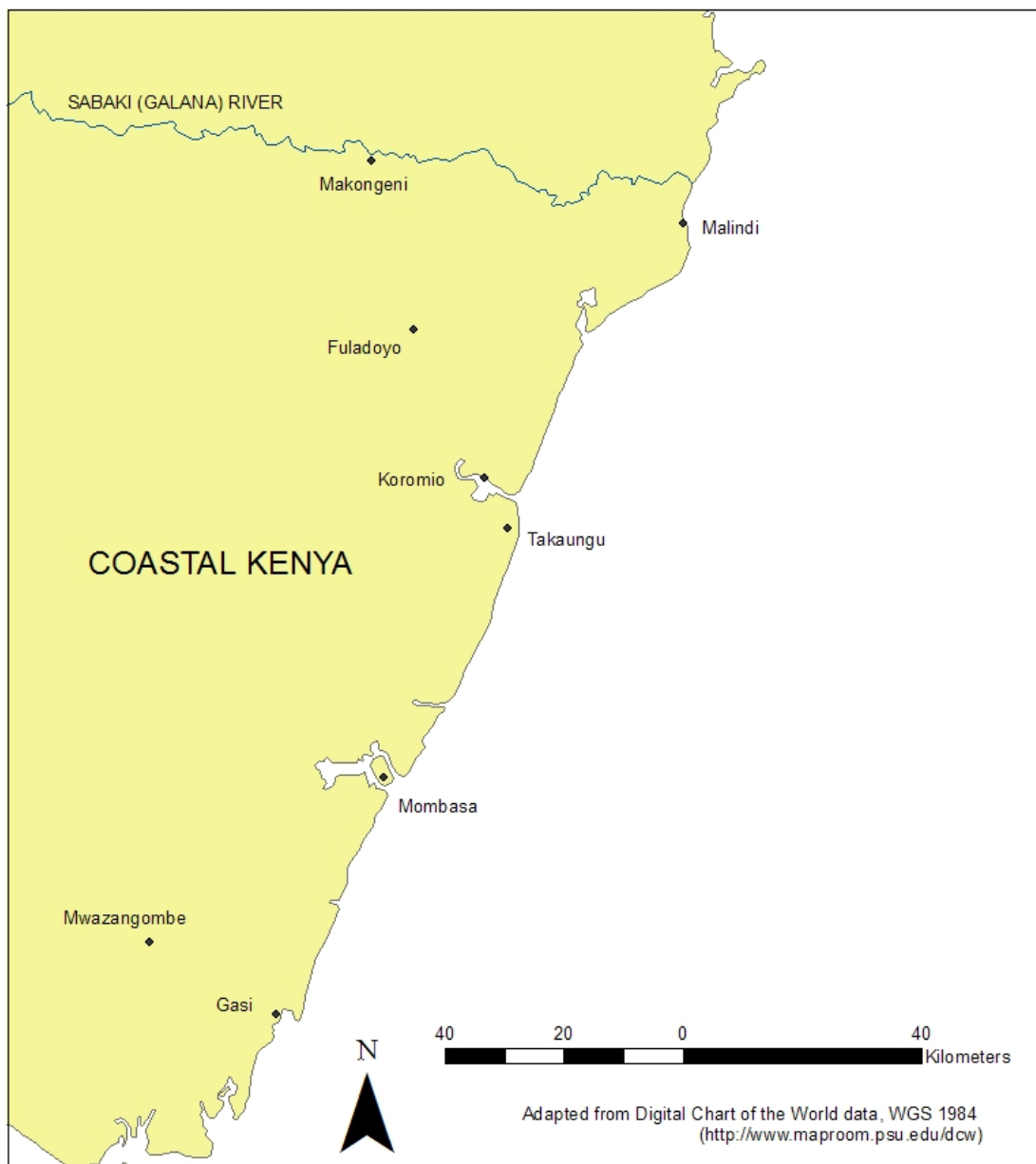


Figure 1: Locations of fugitive slave sites (Fuladoyo, Koromio, Makongeni, and Mwazangombe) identified through reconnaissance in a June 2006 survey. The sites were mapped using UTM coordinates obtained on-site with a GPS unit.



through use of a pocket transit, pull tape, compasses, and pacing. The survey team will screen, bag, and record any finds on survey forms. Once the approximate edges of a watoro site have been detected, these will be marked on a topographic map. Following this, I will interview local elders to identify nearby 19th-century Mijikenda sites. I then will use a 10-meter shovel test pit (STP) grid to delineate Mijikenda site boundaries. These surveys will also help to gauge site preservation and integrity, which will inform my selection of sites for excavation. I expect to complete the survey within three months of my arrival in Kenya.

### **Phase II: Identification and Excavation of Houses, Domestic Activity Areas, and Middens**

The following five months I plan to devote to the second phase of my research project, excavation at two watoro villages and two neighboring Mijikenda settlements. As my research questions necessitate inter-household comparison, I will first focus on finding houses. One watoro site I surveyed in June 2006 yielded aboveground house remains. The 10-meter STP grid completed in Phase I is also likely to identify house locations through artifact concentrations, stratigraphic indications of packed floors, and other anomalous (potentially domestic) features. However, if necessary, I plan to rely on STPs placed every five meters within settlement limits to identify more houses. These shovel test pits will overlay and fill in the 10-meter STP grid completed to identify site boundaries. Nineteenth-century Mijikenda houses were generally between four and eight meters in diameter (Prins 1952:60); there is no evidence that watoro constructed significantly larger structures. Thus, a five- (rather than 10-) meter resolution will be more effective in identifying houses at both site types. To maximize the efficacy of STPs in locating domestic structures, the interior sides of each pit will be scraped and stratigraphy examined. Where clarification about potential structures is necessary, I will use one-square-meter test excavations, which may be particularly useful in identifying posthole impressions.

This stage of my research will be informed by prior work in the archaeological identification of earthen houses in Eastern Africa (Fleisher and LaViolette 1999), historical understandings of Eastern African building techniques (McKim 1985), and my own research experience excavating houses built by similar construction methods.

Mijikenda houses are described in 19th-century accounts as oblong or circular structures with a series of small posts along their outer edge supporting a wooden frame and grass thatching. The houses were also generally structurally reliant on a single central pillar. Identification of Mijikenda houses will include detection of holes from these two post types in test excavations. The appearance and structure of watoro houses remains unclear and may exhibit intra-site diversity. If watoro houses were grass-thatched like Mijikenda structures, they will be marked by postholes. If watoro modeled their domestic structures after Swahili wattle-and-daub architecture, their remains may be visible as mounds and will be otherwise distinguishable through a distinctive stratigraphic layer of collapsed wall. After mapping house locations within each site, I will focus on opening large horizontal excavations to capture entire structures and associated middens. I plan to excavate between four and eight houses at each studied site; houses will be selected from several site areas, as adjacent structures are likely to be more closely genealogically and/or culturally related. The recentness of the time period of interest and consequently shallow level of cultural deposits expected makes such broad horizontal excavations feasible. In Croucher's study of a 19th-century Swahili plantation, deposit depths ranged between  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a meter, except for midden pits, which extended as far as 1.25 meters below ground level (Croucher 2006:193-203). Though I will excavate earlier levels of occupation if I encounter them, I expect similarly shallow cultural deposits.

As detailed above, my primary research focus is the excavation of houses and adjacent domestic areas. However, if they are identified, I also intend to sample community middens. Settlement middens are particularly useful in the interpretation of community diet and may be recognized through STPs. Middens are likely to exhibit greater artifact densities and potentially deeper deposits than other site areas. Classes of artifacts I expect to encounter in excavation include local pottery, craft items, and faunal remains. Imported ceramics and other non-local goods may also be recovered. I will collect soil samples to later float for botanical remains and sieve all excavated soil through quarter-inch screens.

A central emphasis of the proposed project is the spatial analysis of domestic activities, which requires fairly detailed provenience information for excavated material. Though I have arranged to borrow a Total Station, I also plan to engage two concurrent and complementary approaches to record provenience information. First, when I encounter potential activity areas during excavation, I will point-provenience, sketch, and photograph all related excavated material. Secondly, I plan to take a series of bird's-eye photographs to capture more dispersed artifact and bone scatters. As the dimensions of rectangular excavation units will be known, these photographs may be later geo-rectified and artifact locations digitized using GIS software. Recent applications of similar methods in South America attest to their potential utility (Craig and Aldenderfer 2003). Achieving such bird's-eye photographs in Eastern Africa also appears feasible. During their excavation of the 10th- to 16th-century Swahili site Chwaka, Fleisher and LaViolette (2006) hired craftsmen to construct a four-meter-tall freestanding wooden ladder. While researchers in this case used the ladder to take photographs of standing stone architecture, a similarly inexpensive structure would serve my purposes well.

### **Phase III: On-Site Laboratory Analysis and Curation**

My final three-and-a-half months in Kenya will center on artifact and ecofact analysis. Anticipated classes of excavated material include: botanical remains, faunal refuse, local ceramics, imported ceramics, other imported material such as glass, craft-related items, faunal and/or lithic tools, and house construction materials. I plan to rely on outside expertise in the analysis of botanical and faunal remains while overseeing interpretation of all remaining classes of excavated material. Following an initial sort of recovered bone and shell, I will hire a specialist from the Osteology Department of the National Museums of Kenya's (NMK) main Nairobi branch to complete a more detailed analysis of represented species and skeletal elements. Upon returning to the United States, I will send any botanical material recovered through soil flotation to a specialist for analysis. Diet is central to both of my research questions; botanical and faunal remains promise insight into intra-household cultural diversity as well as economic strategies and wellbeing at the household and settlement levels.

I plan to catalogue artifacts during the excavation period. However, I will later undertake more detailed analysis of excavated material in the laboratories of the NMK's Coastal Archaeology Department in Mombasa, where all recovered artifacts will be permanently stored. As Kenya's national antiquity laws forbid the removal of artifacts from the nation, my analysis must proceed in country. Analysis of local ceramics will center on vessel decoration, shape, and size, which may be estimated through rim curvature. For the interpretation of settlement economic organization and cultural heterogeneity, these three indices may be particularly useful in illuminating the spatial organization of domestic activities such as cooking. In the analysis of imported pottery, I will model my typologies on those developed in recent archaeological studies of 19th-century Swahili plantations (Croucher 2004, 2006) and again rely on vessel decoration,

shape, and size as interpretive foci. Like other imported material, non-local ceramics may illuminate inter-settlement economic and/or sociocultural connections. However, the density and use patterns of imported ceramics may also clarify intra-settlement economic *and cultural* diversity. Ethnohistorical work has suggested that 19th-century Swahili communities relied on blue imported plates and bowls as protective devices against the evil eye, typically displayed these pieces in the interior rooms of their homes, and refrained from using them in food preparation or consumption, excepting the presentation of certain ceremonial meals (Donley-Reid 1990). Different use patterns of imported ceramics thus may signal distinct cultural orientations. Craft-related items, such as spindle whorls and iron slag, will be valuable in reconstructing settlement economic organization and wellbeing. Craft production in excess of a community's needs would suggest an interest and ability to engage in regional trade. Faunal or lithic tools, with which I have significant analytical experience, may aid in the interpretation of settlement and household economic strategies. Household construction materials, such as daub, may be particularly valuable at watoro settlements in the interpretation of house style and cultural heterogeneity.

In all phases of research, I will integrate archaeological evidence with available oral and written historical sources. Though such evidentiary types will not invariably confirm one another, the dissonances that arise between them may yield new and interesting directions for interpretation and analysis (LaViolette 2004). The preliminary survey I undertook in June 2006 assured me of local peoples' willingness to share oral histories about watoro groups. Although slavery remains a sensitive topic of inquiry in Kenya, this sensitivity is much more marked on the Swahili-dominated coast where the descendents of enslaved workers continue to struggle for land rights against the descendents of plantation owners. In the hinterland communities in which

I propose to work, people were willing to discuss watoro communities and were not ill at ease in such discussions. Finally, much of the spatial analysis I plan to undertake will occur in the United States after the expiry of the grant period. I plan to digitize bird's-eye photographs and import Total Station data into ArcGIS software as a first step in the interpretation of domestic spatial organization of activities. Such investigations will be facilitated by my previous experience in qualitative and quantitative approaches to activity area analysis, as well as my familiarity with GIS software tools.

### **Research Preparation**

In preparation for the proposed project, I have achieved Swahili language proficiency, fostered a long-standing relationship with the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), and participated in extensive archaeological survey, excavation, and analysis in the U.S. and Africa. Five years field experience has equipped me with the technical skills necessary to lead an archaeological investigation. Of particular relevance are multiple research experiences in historical archaeology and Eastern African archaeology. My relationship with the NMK dates back to 2002 when I interned with the Archaeology Department while an exchange student. I returned to Kenya in 2003 and spent the following academic year at the NMK assessing an Iron-Age lithic assemblage and helping to develop an on-site archaeological outreach program for Kenyan secondary school students at the Kariandusi Regional Museum (Wilson and Gatheru 2003). In June 2006, the Coastal Archaeology Department offered instrumental support in my preliminary survey of watoro sites and I plan to integrate Department employees into all phases of the proposed project. The relationship I have fostered with the NMK will facilitate such collaborative efforts.

Prior experience in Eastern Africa has also equipped me for the practical challenges of doing research in the region. In summer 2006, I worked as a unit supervisor on a six-week excavation at Chwaka, a 10th- to 16th-century site in Pemba, Tanzania. The excavation and analysis of earthen structures there has prepared me for the study of similarly constructed buildings in 19th-century sites. The project also required me to direct nine local workers exclusively in Swahili. I first enrolled in an introductory Swahili language class as an exchange student in 2002. In 2003-2004, I engaged a Swahili tutor while volunteering at the NMK. I completed intermediate and advanced Swahili courses at the State University of Zanzibar in 2005. Having prepared extensively for the technical, practical, and language challenges of the proposed project, I hope and expect my research in Kenya to proceed successfully.

### **Anticipated Project Schedule**

September 1-15, 2007, *Project Set-up*: Meet with National Museums of Kenya (NMK) and local government officials; finalize research permits; prepare field equipment.

September 16 - November 30, 2007, *Phase I*: Site identification and delineation of site boundaries.

December 1 2007 - April 30, 2008, *Phase II*: Identification and excavation of houses, domestic activity areas, and middens.

May 1 - August 15, 2008, *Phase III*: On-site laboratory analysis and curation, Coastal Archaeology Department, Mombasa.

August 15-31, 2008, *Project Wrap-up*: Meet with NMK officials; organize outreach activities and public lectures.

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## Notes

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**Return to September 2007 Newsletter:**

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